

# Ten Common Questions About Quaking Aspen

*Originally prepared by: UW Cooperative Extension Service Laramie County  
Mary K Small Horticulturist*



## **How can I get rid of shoots coming up in the lawn?**

The shoots form on the root system of the parent tree; this is “grooving” and is what develops the large stands in nature. In the yard, keep the shoot mowed off to prevent the development of an aspen stand there! Chemical shoot treatments are not recommended because they can move through the root system and affect the parent tree.

## **Why are some of the aspen leaves so pale?**

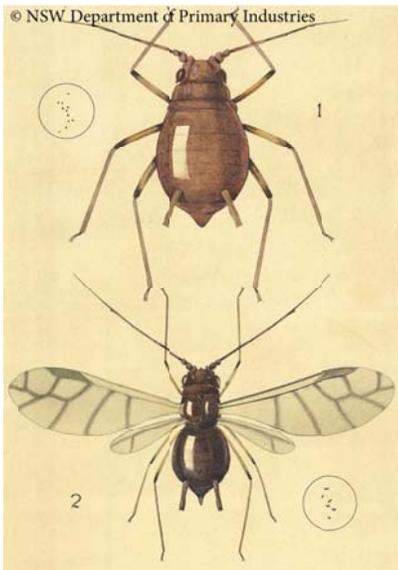
Pale green or yellow aspen leaves during the growing season are a result of iron chlorosis, a problem common in alkaline soils. While iron chlorosis is often caused by a soil chemistry problem, other factors may contribute to it. Compacted soils, excess water, insufficient water, high sunlight and high soil temperatures also cause chlorosis or worsen it. Correction of chlorosis is difficult. Adding iron to the soil at budbreak and adjusting environmental conditions may help. Chlorosis may be impossible to correct, however.

### **Ants are crawling all over my aspen. Are they harmful? How do discourage them?**

Ants are collecting honeydew, a sweet substance produced by aphids. Ants may also act like "shepherds", moving aphids around and defending them against predators. Reduce the aphid population and the ants should disappear, too.

### **What are aphids? What should be done about them?**

Aphids are small, pear-shaped insects of various colors that suck sap out of plants and may weaken them. They are usually found on tender growth, such as shoots and leaves. Small populations on healthy aspen shouldn't be harmful to plant health. Monitor aphids to see if natural predators like ladybugs and lacewings appear. In the meantime, hose them off with a forceful stream of water. Insecticidal soaps and several insecticides are also available for heavier populations.



### **What causes large black blotches to form on the leaves?**

Large blotches, usually appearing from July through frost, are caused by cottonwood blotch leafminers. The adult a yellow and black beetle lays her eggs on the leaf surface. After the eggs hatch, the young larvae enter the leaf and feed between the upper and lower surface. Their feeding causes the blotches. Leafminer is tough to control once inside the leaf because it is physically protected from Insecticides. There are two approaches to control. 1.) Don't worry about them, since around 80 percent of the leaves have to be infected before plant health is in danger. 2.) Apply insecticide to the leaves when mines are first seen. This may kill adults as well as the newly hatched larvae before they enter the leaf.

### **Why are some leaves black in the spring?**

There are two possibilities. 1.) Spring frost still occurs while aspen leaves are still emerging. Frosts may blacken leaf edges or entire leaves. Usually just the newest ones are injured, but it depends on the severity of the frost and leaf maturity. Damaged leaves will drop off and new green ones will form. 2.) A fungus disease, shoot blight, causes black areas on leaves. These may enlarge and spread through young shoots and leaves causing them to blacken entirely and distort. Shoots often look like a shepherd's crook. This problem is especially severe in wet years or when aspen leaves are regularly splashed by irrigation water. To reduce disease next year, rake up leaves in the fall and prune out diseased twigs. Fungicides are useful as a preventative when applied prior to budbreak. Once the disease occurs, fungicides cannot kill it.

### **What makes the leaves turn brown?**

Brown leaf edges and browning between the leaf veins are the result of scorch. Scorch occurs when temperatures rise into the 80's and warm winds blow. The lush spring growth loses large amounts of water that the plant's root system can't replace. Sometimes watering doesn't help because the root system can't keep up with the loss. Too much water more than one application a week can aggravate scorch. Excess water suffocates the root system. Dead roots or poorly functioning ones can't absorb adequate water to replace the loss.

### **What causes brown spots and leaf death during the summer?**

Small brown spots may be caused by leaf spot a fungus disease. The fungus overwinters in fallen leaves and splashes to the newly developing growth in the spring, several small spots may join to form larger brown ones as the season progresses. Affected leaves: often drop prematurely. Fungicides are: useful as a preventive when applied before budbreak.

### **What are the tiny gray bumps on the trunk and some branches?**

Oystershell scale. These insects suck sap out of the host plant and may weaken or kill it. Much of the life cycle is spent under the "oystershell", making control difficult. In late spring and early summer, the young hatch and crawl out from under the shells to establish new colonies. Chemical control is most successful during this vulnerable time. Dormant populations may be removed by gently rubbing the scales off with a nylon dish scrubber.

### **Why are branches dying?**

Branch death can have more than one cause maybe a combination of them.

- 1.) Mechanical injury; such as a squirrel chewing on the bark or from lawnmowers or weed eaters striking and wounding the bark. These injuries damage or destroy water and nutrient conducting tissues under the bark.
- 2.) Cytospora canker; this fungus disease destroys water and nutrient conducting tissue under the bark, killing branches. Look for orange colored sunken areas with or without black pimple like structures in them. Trace the dead branch as far back as its point of origin if necessary to find the canker. If it is on just a few branches, remove them, sterilizing pruning tools between each cut (mix one part bleach with nine parts water). If the problem is on the trunk, the best solution is removal, especially if other aspen or cottonwood trees are in the area. The cytospora canker fungus is a weak one, generally affecting only stressed trees.
- 3.) Borers; adult beetles lay eggs on the bark. Their larvae (worm like creatures) chew through the bark and begin tunneling in the wood underneath it. This disrupts the flow of nutrients and water in the plant and kills it. Borers are difficult to control once they affect the tree, because the bark protects them from pesticides. Stressed trees are especially attractive to borers.
- 4.) Oystershell scale; continual removal of sap from plant branches will kill them.
- 5.) Planting problems; trees were planted too deep, roots and or trunks were strangled from twine not removed after planting, soil is compacted, too wet, too dry, etc.
- 6.) Iron chlorosis; untreated iron chlorosis can cause branch death.
- 7.) Weather related problems such as sudden freezes following warm weather.